

Episode 53

Anyway! By working in the Islamic Fiqh Academy, I realized the importance of this organization. Today it is regarded as a highly esteemed organization all over the Islamic world and people of knowledge regard its resolutions as quite weighty. In new books and research, its resolutions and the essays presented in its meetings are considered as sources of reference. And I feel no hesitation in saying that the organization's President Shaykh Bakr Abu Zaid and Secretary-General Shaykh Habib Balkhouja both played a significant role in bringing it to this level. After a few years however, Shaykh Bakr Abu Zaid became so indisposed that it was no longer possible for him to continue working in the Academy, and eventually his appointed time arrived and he left this world. *Innā Lillāhi Wa Innā Ilayhi Rāji'ūn.*

After the demise of Shaykh Bakr Abu Zaid, the Imam of Masjid al-Haram Hadhrat Shaykh Abdullah bin Salih bin Al-Humaid¹ was made the President of the Academy. Alhamdulillah he also rendered this service with great ability. He has also remained the President of Saudi Arabia's Majlis Al-Shura (Consultative Council), and is currently an Advisor to the King in the Royal Court. I was acquainted to him from before, so by the grace of Allah we have established a good rapport. Until some time after he became President, Shaykh Habib Balkhouja remained as the Secretary-General. When Turkey's Mustafa Oglu became the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the umbrella organization under which the Islamic Fiqh Academy was established, he created a committee consisting of old members of the Academy to review the Academy's Constitution in view of changing circumstances. At that time, Shaykh Habib Balkhouja was still the Academy's Secretary-General. He later became too weak to handle the responsibility, and Jordan's Dr Abdul Salam Abbadi was made the Secretary-General in his place. Numerous conferences of the Academy were organized by him, but after a few years, he was made the Minister of Awqaf in Jordan so he moved there, and the seat of the Secretary-General of the Academy remained vacant. Search to find a suitable replacement for him continued for

¹ Translator: This seems like a typographical error. It should be Hadhrat Shaykh Salih bin Abdullah bin Al-Humaid

some time, and due to this position remaining vacant, no conferences could take place during this time.

My Appointment as the Secretary-General of the Islamic Fiqh Academy

During those days, I was undergoing a severe illness of the bladder and prostate gland that continued for several months. I was in the midst of this illness when I suddenly received a phone call from the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Mr Mustafa Oglu, who informed that after a high-level meeting of the OIC, I had been appointed the Secretary-General of the Islamic Fiqh Academy. He congratulated me at this appointment and informed that I would soon receive documents of this appointment. Soon after, I received a call from Hadhrat Shaykh Abdullah bin Salih bin Humaid as well. While congratulating me, he said: "Please come to Jeddah as soon as possible. InshaAllah we shall work together to advance the work of the Academy, and rest assured that you shall have my full cooperation." When I mentioned some of my difficulties, he said: "I personally request you to please accept this offer." After a few days, the official appointment letter also arrived. It mentioned a remuneration of four thousand dollars per month, a Grade A house in Jeddah, a car with a driver, a private secretary, as well as a personal attendant as the benefits. It stated that my position would be at the same level as an ambassador, and that I would be accorded all the privileges and benefits provided to the ambassador of any country, including during international travel.

This offer became a great trial for me. It was by the special grace and favour of Allah Most High that not much attraction was felt due to the financial benefits related to this offer. Nonetheless, there were several points of attraction for me. The first attraction was nearness to the Haramain Shareefain, and the ease with which I could visit them in that capacity appeared rather alluring. Secondly, the work of the Academy matched my taste and I have previously mentioned my heartfelt attachment to it. Thirdly, I thought that the administrative work for the Academy was mainly required during the time when a conference was being organized. I would thus receive a lot of time in between for writing. And access to books while staying in Jeddah would also be much more convenient compared to Pakistan. Fourthly, I also thought that if a Pakistani student

of knowledge was linked to this international organization in the capacity of a head, it would help create a link of the scholars of the subcontinent with the Muslim world, and I would also receive chances to introduce our elders' services to the Muslim world.

All these points were quite attractive, but there were some hurdles as well. The greatest hurdle was my own disposition. From the very beginning, my nature has become so habituated to the sweetness of working in the Darul Uloom that leaving it and working somewhere else feels a burden, and this is why I have excused myself on numerous previous occasions as well. Secondly, from the beginning I am accustomed to living with my children. In case of moving to Jeddah, it would not have been possible to move all my children with me, at least not immediately. Thirdly, I was apprehensive of being pressured after taking up responsibilities of the Academy. Alhamdulillah in the capacity of a member or Vice President of the Academy, I did not have to report to anyone nor was I compelled to adhere to any specific policies. I have thus been freely doing whatever I considered the right thing. However, I did not have any idea of the kind of restrictions I would have to face if I accepted this position. And if I were to restructure my present way of life and move to Jeddah, and at some later point my heart became dissatisfied, what issues would I have to face after so much upheaval?

In short, a peculiar anxiety stirred in my heart at the thought of all these issues. I was going through a lengthy illness at that time, and due to its strain as well, accepting any new responsibility felt very burdensome. When I sought advice from the colleagues and elders in Darul Uloom, all of them opined that I should definitely accept this position. Even my elder brother Hadhrat Maulana Mufti Muhammad Rafi Usmani (may his shade be extended) said: "Though Darul Uloom will face numerous issues due to your leaving, and your leaving bears heavily on my heart as well, in view of the overall (religious) benefits, accepting the position seems appropriate". At the same time, I received repeated messages from Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the effect: "Your appointment is an honour for Pakistan. Please do not reject it". I received the same messages from Arab scholars with whom I was friends, to such an extent that a very senior scholar of Riyadh Shaykh Abdul Rahman Atram (who is currently a member of the Majlis Shura) phoned me several times with the words: "We have numerous apprehensions in

case you do not accept the offer, and I have also had several meetings with Shaykh Abdullah bin Salih on this matter, and it is our unanimous opinion that you should accept this position”.

I also considered the possibility of serving the Academy from Karachi itself without moving, and to visit Jeddah from time to time. However, this scenario was not feasible from an administrative perspective. I anyway wished to travel for Umrah so I eventually decided to personally examine the conditions in the Academy’s offices after the Umrah, and to make any decision after meeting the relevant individuals. I thus travelled for Umrah with my wife and elder son dear Maulvi Imran Ashraf (may Allah keep him safe), and during the two-day stay in Jeddah, met the Secretary-General of the OIC Mr Mustafa Oglu. I also visited the Academy’s Secretariat and surveyed the conditions there. During the meeting with Mr Oglu, when I mentioned my difficulties, he said: “We will try our best to obtain Iqama for one married son of yours with his wife”. He also said: “I have discussed the matter with the Academy’s President Shaykh Abdullah bin Salih, and we have decided that you can first come here for six months. After that, you can decide whether you wish to continue, and if it does not suit you, you could go back”. Thereafter Shaykh Abdullah bin Salih, who was in Riyadh at that time, reiterated the same thing on phone.

It was very difficult to reject this generous offer. Coincidentally, my elder brother Hadhrat Maulana Mufti Muhammad Rafi Usmani (may his shade be extended) was also visiting for Umrah at that time. When this point came up while talking to him, he said: “Now you should not reject this request”. I felt much reassured at his words, but I was continuously performing *Istikhārah* throughout this time, and continued performing it in Masjid al-Haram as well. The more I performed *Istikhārah*, the less I felt inclined towards accepting this offer. Coincidentally, my illness also got protracted due to which my weight suddenly dropped by about ten kilograms. Meanwhile, I was receiving repeated phone calls from Shaykh Salih bin Humaid regarding this matter. I thus did not like to prolong the matter any further. The outcome of the *Istikhārah* was also that I should not accept this responsibility, and at the same time my illness was also an appropriate excuse. I finally excused myself from this responsibility by citing my illness, weakness and situation at home. Shaykh expressed his sadness at this, but at the same time magnanimously accepted my apology. Albeit, at a later meeting he said, out of frankness: "I shall not shake your

hand”, at which I replied: “You have full right to do so, but I know that you cannot turn down my extended hand”. At this, he smiled and almost wrapped me in his embrace.

Anyway! In this manner, I was absolved of the responsibility of being the Secretary-General of the Islamic Fiqh Academy. However, Alhamdulillah I am still linked to its worked until this day, and by the grace of Allah Most High, the work is continued with good rapport with Shaykh Salih bin Humaid. Albeit, later Allah Most High made it very clear to me that my excusing myself from this position was the correct decision. As I have mentioned before, Shaykh Bakr Abu Zaid (may Allah have mercy on him) was quite rigorous with respect to religious matters and would not let anything occur that could blemish the scholarly dignity of the Academy or give any hint of its being influenced by Westernism. At the same time, the government of Saudi Arabia was quite cooperative with the Academy. There was therefore no pressure on the Academy’s resolutions or its administrative decisions. However, with respect to this point, the administration that came after Shaykh Bakr Abu Zaid and Shaykh Habib Balkhouja (may Allah have mercy on them) was not the same as them. Furthermore, among the Academy’s members, the ones I have especially mentioned before passed away one by one or became incapacitated, and the Academy was deprived of such rigorous individuals as Shaykh Siddiq al-Dharir, Shaykh Wahba Zuhayli, Shaykh Abdul Rahman al-Bassam, Shaykh Ali Al-Saloos and others, and ever new young faces continued coming up, such that when I attended the last conference of the Academy that took place in Madinah Munawwarah (after which no conference could take place until now due to the Coronavirus), the following couplet kept coming to mind with minor alterations:

أما الخيام، فإنّها كخيّامهم

وأري رجال الحّيّ غير رجالها

Meanwhile, it also occurred that some matters which were not relevant to the topic of the Academy were circulated with the Academy’s name. And when I protested this, some individuals became offended at my objection, rather some members told me not to say such things openly. It felt that there was some governmental pressure on the Academy’s Secretary General and President due to which they made that announcement. While it was said that that

announcement was on behalf of the Academy's President and Secretary General and (not the Academy), the Academy's letter-pad and logo had been used for it, and the words did not clarify that that announcement was not on behalf of the Academy, rather its President and Secretary General.

Some other incidents also occurred which would not have been possible at least in the presence of Shaykh Bakr Abu Zaid (may Allah have mercy on him). At that time, I thanked Allah Most High for my not accepting the position of Secretary-General before, for those matters would have been unbearable for me and I would have been confronted with a trial regarding the steps I should take.

All of these issues were mostly of an administrative nature, and by the grace and favour of Allah Most High, until now no jurisprudential verdict has been issued from the Academy at which one would feel embarrassment. May Allah Most High protect this organization, which has acquired a high position in the Islamic world, from all kinds of trials, and may it never deviate from the straight path. *Āmīn*.